

Departures

Deathly Motif for a Movie

Christian McGlothlin-Clason

JAPN 310 Japanese Cinema

Dr. Takahashi

This movie presented a frightening motif in a beautiful way. This motif stands as a threatening idea in many cultures, fearing that very end of all things. This motif is “death” as properly named for subtle context of the movie’s statement.

There is not much context that people can go on when approaching a funeral, without any previous experience. Seeing Japanese style memorials is a new and unique experience, just to realize how a loved one’s departure is addressed, how people in Japan react to death, and how people involved with death are viewed. In the West, there are varying views of people who handle dead bodies and organize funerals, memorials and other rituals related to the dead. To see the Japanese view of this on screen is a riveting experience. It is the same thing held in the West, but in a different format and process.

One thing I noticed that is not an obvious distinction in the movie, is the idea of cremation in Japan. In the West, it is a choice between burial in a coffin or cremation. In Japan, there is not land space for burial sites, so everything from the coffin to the order of processing the body surrounds cremation. In the West, there are people who cringe at the idea of their body being burned to a crisp, while in Japan, that is simply part of the process. The way people mourn their loved ones and the way loved ones are respected is a whole different process in Japan than in the West.

The lighting in this movie was beautiful but dark. It fit the mood well, and kept the audience in a low state when it was most necessary. However, it did not darken the faces of the dead, instead it lit them up and showed them to be as lively as the coffiners dressed them up to be. The music was beautiful and reminiscent of Sarabande from Bach's Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor and other similar works that are sometimes used at large memorial services, which varies between how rich the people were and how many people are being mourned at the service. The

camera itself was positioned to constantly show characters front and center, until there was need to see more. There were these few scenes where a larger landscape was shown to understand the mood or surroundings of a character.

This movie was beautiful and very heartfelt. Its most prominent moments are those few laughable scenes, the strange ones and the tear jerkers. I do not like watching tear jerker movies, but this one was very relatable. A musician giving up on his art to try getting a “normal job” is an experience I have been through, on a smaller scale. Giving up an art that one loves very much for financial security is a big decision that one may feel relieved for at first, but comes back as a haunting regret in later time.

The relationship between the two characters was nothing notable, very simplistic at best. The only thing notable was that they generally got along, though that made them very easy to understand, because they were a normal couple with normal problems. It kept the movie centered on the despair of death, leaving out the drama of everyday nuisances, except for those related to death. One example was when the wife discovered the odd video of him pretending to be a corpse and found out more about the company. It was a normal spat relating to appearances and fear of what others might think, in light of the darkness of death. Then the protagonist’s drama over his father was a buildup that gave a little character building, but a buildup to the ending result: his father’s death. The story was so heavily laden with hints that at some point the audience would get to finally meet the face of the man who broke this young artist’s heart, that by the end, there is nothing but tear jerking anxiety. This left nothing noteworthy in the end of the story, when the father’s face was revealed, it was just a tear jerking event.

Overall, this movie performed what it sought out to do: create tears. This tear jerking film is sad and emotional at every turn, but it does it with some artistic touches. Instead of making

every scene sad, it does buildup every character important to the plot. Every character that necessarily leaves the protagonist's life was given proper characterization so that the viewer is invested in this person's relationship to the protagonist. This made even the wife's leaving a small emotional situation. It was not just a bunch of sad scenes meant to pull at one's tears, it was an actual story that was very sad in the ending. For its constant need to create sadness, I did not favor it much. But with its artistic touches to create a story that the viewer cannot think of as cheap or weak, I give this movie a five out of five. An extra bit for approaching a sad motif in a different light.